

# Raymond C. Davis

## 1836-1919

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IT IS MY GOOD FORTUNE to have been a member of Mr. Davis'<sup>1</sup> staff for eight years—1897-1905. He was then in his sixties, a dignified gentleman with a fine physique, six feet two inches tall, erect, dark gray hair and mustache, bright eyes with a friendly twinkle in them. He was held in high esteem by his staff and by his colleagues in the university. The students appreciated his sympathetic interest in their problems and his willingness to assist them. He took a personal interest in every member of his staff. He delegated responsibilities to them for the development of their respective lines of work. He suggested policies and outlined their work, and allowed them to work out details and to suggest improvements in the service. He was modest, friendly, agreeable. Neither the students nor the members of the staff, nor the young men on the faculty stood in awe of him. His manner and attitude invited confidence. He was one of the distinguished university librarians of his time.

Men have entered the library profession from the ministry, from the legal profession, from faculties of universities, from the printing trades, and have made suc-

cessful careers in the library profession. Their backgrounds, however, included a college or university education. I have known only one librarian whose youth was spent on the sea and in the shipping business—R. C. Davis.

He was born in Cushing, Me., June 23, 1836, on a small farm near Penobscot Bay. His father was a sea captain, his brother a mate. When Raymond was thirteen years of age, his father took him on a voyage around the world. His ship carried lumber from the Maine forests to San Francisco. The ship next sailed to Honolulu, then across the Indian Ocean to Calcutta where it was loaded with olive oil, seeds, hides, and the like for merchants in London. The ship put into the ports of Rio de Janeiro, Valparaiso, San Francisco, Honolulu, Calcutta, and London. It rounded Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope. While Raymond was assigned no specific duties on the ship, he did learn all about the management of the ship. He went ashore in the ports and saw the beautifully landscaped parks, spacious avenues, and public buildings of Rio. He saw how people lived in all these ports; learned what the different countries produced and shipped;—about the geography of the world,—countries, rivers, cities, mountain ranges, trade winds, hurricanes, and the like. Several years later, 1869, he wrote for children an in-

<sup>1</sup> Assistant librarian, University of Michigan 1868-1872, librarian 1877-1905, librarian emeritus 1906-1919.

teresting account of his two years voyage 1849-51, and published it under the title of *Reminiscences of a Voyage around the World*.

Upon his return from the voyage he entered Hampton Academy and finished his preparatory work in Kimball Union Academy, both in New Hampshire. Then he matriculated in the University of Michigan in 1855. In 1857 he became seriously ill. His physician told him that he must have ten years relief from mental work. He urged him to secure out-of-door work. He therefore went back to the sea. There is no record of his activities during these ten years.

Through the recommendation of his classmate and intimate friend, Claudius B. Grant, Mr. Davis was elected by the board of regents to the position of assistant librarian of the university in 1868. As assistant librarian he cataloged books and wrote the cards for the public catalog.

When the librarian, Dr. Andrew Ten Brook, resigned in 1877, the board of regents elected Mr. Davis librarian of the university at a salary of \$1000 a year. The library contained 23,909 volumes. The annual appropriation was \$1000. The annual increase was six hundred volumes.

The year 1877 was an epoch in the history of the library for three reasons:

1. Raymond C. Davis began his long service of twenty-eight years as librarian. He was a modest conservative energetic young man, who had already proved his worth, who had acquired good business experience, who was an author, and had a keen appreciation of the service of books in the education of students.

2. The state legislature began a series of special appropriations for the library. The initial appropriation was \$1000.

3. Alumni and friends were becoming conscious of the needs of the library. Gifts

began coming in larger numbers. Large gifts were not lacking. The McMillan Shakespeare library of 2500 volumes was received in 1882, later the Goethe library. The income from the Coyle fund and the Ford-Messer fund was expended for special classes of books supplemental to those secured on state appropriations.

Mr. Davis was an adept in soliciting books as gifts for the library. The number of gifts soon exceeded the number of books acquired annually by purchase.

#### *Purchases Limited*

The allotment for the purchase of books was so limited that Mr. Davis had to use extreme care in the selection of books to be purchased. He searched secondhand catalogs and auction catalogs for bargains. Writing about the library's collection of books, Dr. Bishop called it "an admirable selection of books, purchased with rare skill with meager funds."

The circulation of books was rather limited as students were not allowed to take books from the reading room, but professors were. The reading room in the building was ample for several years. The seminary rooms were limited to advanced and graduate students. A new library building was erected in 1883 and was said to have been "the first fruits of his administration." It was one of the earliest university library buildings. It proved to be a very satisfactory building for its purpose. In the course of twenty years additional stacks and study rooms had to be added.

The pioneer university librarians such as R. C. Davis, A. S. Root, J. C. Rowell, and Justin Winsor had no collection of professional library literature which they might consult in the solution of their problems. Nothing had been published on library buildings, on card catalogs, and

classification of books except the preliminary editions of Dewey's decimal classification of 1876. J. C. Rowell devised a classification for the library of the University of California. Mr. Davis continued the "fixed classification" begun by his predecessor, also the card catalog of the books. The cards were written by hand. There were no typewriters adapted for this card work. Cornell University library and Harvard College had also adopted the card index in 1875 in their respective libraries. Later Mr. Rowell changed to the card index. This "fixed system" of classification worked well until the stacks became full. The books could not be moved from one shelf to another without drawing all the cards for them from the public catalog and shelflist and changing the shelf numbers on the cards. The cards were filed in two alphabets: one in an author catalog; the other, in a subject and title catalog. The system became impractical.

Finally in 1897 he decided to adopt the Dewey System with some modifications. From that date all new books were given the new classification. The whole collection of the library, 117,000 volumes, was gradually reclassified.

University librarians of the present day have their problems but a different set of problems than the pioneer librarians had. We have the recorded experience of earlier librarians and the solution of their problems to guide us, but those early librarians used the "cut and try" method until they reached a solution. They had the problems of "departmental libraries," "care of pamphlet material," "use of student help," and "how to acquaint freshmen with the use of the library."

Mr. Davis authorized departmental libraries and made the chairman of the

department responsible for the library in his department. The library acquired bundles of pamphlets in the Parsons Library and accumulated hundreds more in the ordinary routine. He solved this problem by binding the important ones in cheap bindings, which he treated as books. Others which appeared to have value, he arranged by subject and had them—ten or twelve numbers—bound into books.

After his experience as a freshman, in using the library and in his work with students when he was assistant librarian, he concluded that students did not know the existence of such tools as indexes and bibliographies. He therefore began a course way back in 1879 to acquaint the freshman with the card catalog, the indexes, and other reference books and the method of drawing a book from the library. This was probably the first course of its kind to be given freshmen. He continued the course at the opening of the university every year until his resignation.

#### *Course in Bibliography*

Another significant course, and I think the first course of its kind ever offered in any university, was a systematic course of instruction in bibliography, a one-hour course with credit, begun in 1881 and continued until 1914 when the condition of Mr. Davis's health made the discontinuance mandatory. When Melvil Dewey opened his library school in Columbia University, he secured Mr. Davis to give the course in bibliography. He continued his annual lectures until the library school was transferred to Albany.

The publications of universities and of learned and scientific societies and institutions have been a prolific source of valuable material for our libraries. Since the turn of the century all the large univer-

sity libraries, domestic and foreign, have established exchange relations with one another.

In 1894 Mr. Davis saw the possibility of accumulating this class of material for his library. He advocated the establishment of a journal by the university which might be a medium for publishing the results of researches in the university. His second motive was to have the journal to send university and society libraries in exchange for their publications. Ten years elapsed before such a system of exchanges was organized.

#### *Established Book Bindery*

Another important venture in university libraries was the establishment of a book bindery in the library in 1897. In his reports he stated that the results had been eminently satisfactory, that books remained in the library for use, that the cost of binding had been less than it would have been if the binding had been done by commercial firms, and that the quality had been superior. Mr. Davis considered the two most important events in his administration, the erection of the library building in 1883 and the establishment of the book bindery. On the occasion of the dedication of the building Mr. Davis gave a short sketch of the history of the library. In this article he urged the board of regents to make this library "a great library center in the wide Northwest." He said the seats of the great libraries in the United States were four—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, and that the fifth center might well be Ann Arbor.

The choice of Theodore W. Koch as assistant librarian in 1904 and librarian 1905-1916 was highly important. He proved to be one of the most efficient

modern librarians.

Mr. Davis was a life member of the American Library Association, having joined in 1878, two years after its organization. This brought him early into contact with leaders of the profession. He was such a modest, unassuming man that he never became prominent in the discussions of the conferences. He was associated with other librarians in compiling the cooperative *Poole's Index* and in other joint undertakings.

#### *Honored by Board of Regents*

The board of regents back in 1884, desiring to recognize the efficient service he was rendering to the faculty and students, conferred upon him the honorary degree of Master of Arts.

Mr. Davis and Ellen Regal, a sister of Mrs. I. N. Demon, professor of English, were married in 1880. They spent their summer vacations in Castine, Me. He was an active member of the First Baptist Church. He resigned his position in 1905 and was given the honorary title of librarian emeritus. He died at his home in Ann Arbor, June 20, 1919.

"His work as a librarian was characterized by great fidelity to duty, by high standards of book selection, and by kindly and friendly relations with his staff, with his colleagues of the faculties, and with all classes of students."<sup>2</sup>

Honorable Claudius B. Grant characterized him as follows: "Mr. Davis was a rare man, rare in his unselfishness, rare in his devotion to duty, rare in his loyalty to truth, rare in his regards for the feelings of others. I have never heard him speak an unkind or harsh word to anyone. A model as a patriotic Christian citizen."

<sup>2</sup> *University Senate Memorial*, Jan. 16, 1920.